

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A system for providing product location information within a store, the system comprising:
a first user interface fixed within the store, the first user interface configured to receive an input signal from a user related to the identity of a product within the store, to process the input signal and to provide a product inquiry signal in response to the input signal, the first user interface further configured to receive a location information signal, and to provide an output signal in response to the location information signal, and

an inventory information unit coupled to the first user interface and comprising a database containing product location information, the inventory information system configured to provide the location information signal to the first user interface after receiving the product inquiry signal from the first user interface.

2. The system of claim 1, wherein the first user interface includes
a receiver configured to receive the input signal, the input signal being a voice signal,
a speaker configured to provide the output signal, the output signal being a synthesized voice signal, and
a voice recognition and response unit configured to process a receiver signal indicative of the input signal and configured to provide a speaker signal from which the speaker generates the synthesized voice signal.

3. The system of claim 1, wherein the voice recognition and response unit includes a microprocessor

3 programmed with voice recognition and voice synthesization
4 software.

1 4. The system of claim 1, wherein the first user
2 interface is at least one of a stand-alone device and a
3 device configured to be mounted on a structure within the
4 store, and wherein the first user interface is configured to
5 be at least one of fixed at an end of an aisle of the store,
6 fixed near a middle of an aisle of the store, fixed within a
7 point of purchase display of the store, fixed on a wall of
8 the store, embedded within a shelving structure of the
9 store, fixed near a checkout counter of the store, and
10 suspended from a ceiling of the store.

1 5. The system of claim 1, wherein the first user
2 interface is configured to provide at least one additional
3 output signal that includes at least one of advertising
4 information, promotional information, information regarding
5 a lack of availability of the product at the store,
6 information regarding an availability of the product at a
7 second store, and information regarding an alternative
8 product.

1 6. The system of claim 1, further comprising an input
2 button, wherein the first user interface is configured to
3 receive the input signal from the user only for a
4 predetermined period of time after the input button has been
5 triggered.

1 7. The system of claim 1, wherein the database of the
2 inventory information unit is programmed with the product
3 location information by downloading the product location

4 information from an overall store information unit that is
5 coupled to the inventory information unit.
6

1 8. The system of claim 1, wherein the first user
2 interface includes
3 a keyboard entry device configured to receive the
4 input signal, the input signal being a keying-in action,
5 a visual display unit configured to provide the
6 output signal, the output signal being a visual output, and
7 a keyboard recognition and response unit
8 configured to process a keyboard signal indicative of the
9 input signal and configured to provide a video signal from
10 which the visual display unit generates the visual output.
11

1 9. The system of claim 8, wherein the keyboard entry
2 device and the visual display unit form a single touch
3 screen input device, and wherein the user interface further
4 includes a printer which is configured to print out at least
5 one of listings and maps.
6

1 10. The system of claim 1, further comprising a second
2 user interface, the second user interface being coupled to
3 the inventory information unit.
4

1 11. The system of claim 1, further comprising a second
2 user interface, the second user interface being coupled to
3 the first user interface that is coupled to the inventory
4 information unit.
5

1 12. The system of claim 11, wherein at least one of:
2 the first user interface acts as an intermediate hub and
3 only intermittently communicates with the inventory

4 information unit; and the second user interface comprises
5 the inventory information unit.

1 13. A system for providing product location
2 information within a store, the system comprising:

3 an information unit including processing circuitry
4 and a database containing product location information, the
5 information unit configured to receive an input signal, to
6 process the input signal, to obtain product location
7 information from the database in response to the processed
8 input signal, and to provide an output signal indicative of
9 information regarding product location; and

10 an input/output device that is fixed at a location
11 within the store, the input/output device configured to
12 receive a user input concerning a product location inquiry
13 and to provide the input signal to the information unit in
14 response to the user input, and to receive the output signal
15 from the information unit and to communicate a user output
16 in response to the output signal, the user output indicative
17 of product location.

1 14. A system for providing product location
2 information within a store, the system comprising:

3 an input means for receiving an input signal;

4 a signal processing means for processing the input
5 signal to generate a product inquiry signal, the signal
6 processing means being coupled to the input means;

7 a data storage means for storing product location
8 information and providing a product location information
9 signal to the signal processing means in response to the
10 product inquiry signal, the data storage means being coupled
11 to the signal processing means, and

an output means for providing an output signal,
the output means also being coupled to the signal processing
means,

wherein the output means generates the output
signal in response to a command signal from the signal
processing means, which generates the command signal in
response to the product location information signal.

15. The system of claim 14, wherein a user interface
comprises at least one of: each of the input means, the
output means, the signal processing means, and the data
storage means; and each of the input means, the output means
and the signal processing means.

16. The system of claim 14, wherein the signal
processing means comprises a first processing means for
processing the input signal to generate the product inquiry
signal, and a second processing means for generating the
command signal, and wherein the data storage means of the
user interface is configured to be programmed with the
product location information by receiving information from a
mobile information unit that may be coupled to the user
interface.

17. The system of claim 14, wherein a user interface
comprises each of the input means, the output means and the
signal processing means, and wherein the user interface is
coupled to a central hub that comprises the data storage
means, and wherein the user interface is coupled to the
central hub by way of electrical wiring.

18. The system of claim 14, wherein the input signal
and the product inquiry signal may each be representative of

3 a query concerning a store feature other than the location
4 of a product, wherein the data storage means is capable of
5 storing information concerning a store feature other than
6 the location of a product, and wherein the output signal and
7 the product location information signal may each be
8 representative of information concerning a store feature
9 other than the location of a product.

1 19. The system of claim 14, wherein a central hub
2 includes the signal processing means and the data storage
3 means, and a user interface includes at least one of the
4 input means and the output means.

1 20. A method of providing product location information
2 within a store, the method comprising the steps of:

3 affixing at least a first input device at a first
4 location within the store;

5 obtaining a product location inquiry at the first
6 input device;

7 processing the product location inquiry at a
8 signal processing device to determine a product location
9 inquiry signal;

10 querying a database to obtain product location
11 information in response to the product location inquiry
12 signal;

13 providing a product location information signal in
14 response to the product location inquiry signal;

15 providing an output signal at an output device,
16 the output signal being a response to the product location
17 inquiry.